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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM: AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA 378 DESP. NO.

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON

DATE: November 2, 1953

REF:

For Dept. Use Only	ACTION	DEPT.
	REC'D 11-6	INFO: OTHER

SUBJECT: Ambassador Peurifoy's Preliminary Call on Foreign Minister Osegueda.

Ambassador-Designate John E. Peurifoy made his preliminary call on Dr. Raúl OSEGUEDA, Guatemalan Foreign Minister, on October 29, 1953 - the day of his arrival in Guatemala - and Dr. Osegueda took advantage of the visit to expound at some length the official Guatemalan viewpoint on such controversial matters as the Labor Code and agrarian reform. In general, he held that social reform of this character was long overdue in Guatemala and ascribed charges in the United States that Guatemala was "a Communist country" to elements opposed to such change. He strongly denied that he was personally sympathetic to Communistic ideas, but made no comment on the general problem of Communist infiltration in the Guatemalan Government. A memorandum recording this conversation is attached.

Dr. Osegueda took the unusual step of receiving Ambassador Peurifoy so soon after his arrival because the Foreign Minister planned to leave for Panamá the following day to head the Guatemalan delegation to the commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of Panamanian Independence (Embassy despatch No. 370, October 29, 1953). The Foreign Minister's manner was courteous throughout the interview, but his statements were rambling and not altogether accurate. Of special note in this connection was his statement that he was glad to see more American priests coming to Guatemala, an assertion which was in sharp contrast with the difficulties of the Maryknoll Fathers and the Franciscans in obtaining permission from the Foreign Office for members of their orders to reside in this country.

William L. Krieg
Chargé d'Affaires a.i.

Enclosure

WLKrieg:rd
REPORTER

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By LWC NARA, Date 9/7/82

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: October 29, 1953

Dr. Raúl OSEGUEDA, Guatemalan Foreign Minister;

Mr. John E. Peurifoy, U.S. Ambassador-Designate to Guatemala;

Mr. William L. Krieg, Counselor of Embassy.

Ambassador Peurifoy made his initial call on Foreign Minister Osegueda at 4:30 p.m. October 29, 1953. After an exchange of greetings, Dr. Osegueda inquired whether there was anything in particular the Ambassador wished to discuss. Mr. Peurifoy said that he understood the Minister was leaving the following day for Panamá and was undoubtedly busy, but that he hoped for an opportunity for a discussion of pending problems after the Minister's return. Dr. Osegueda said he had completed the preparations for his trip and launched into a half-hour discourse in English on social conditions in Guatemala.

Dr. Osegueda commenced by saying that Guatemala was primarily an Indian country, where 68% of the people still spoke their native languages. In an effort to solve the problem this had posed for him when he was Minister of Education, he said he had brought an anthropologist from the University of Chicago and that when Indian leaders came to meet the anthropologist, they had been accompanied by their American priests. He digressed to praise the work of the American priests who, he said, actually lived among the Indians and taught them things useful in their daily lives. He contrasted this with the attitude of Italian priests who lived in the City and "drove around in Cadillacs." He wound up this subject by saying that he was always glad to see more American priests coming to Guatemala.

Dr. Osegueda then said that Guatemala's mountainous terrain created many problems; Mr. Peurifoy remarked that he had just come from another mountainous country, Greece, where only 18% of the soil was arable but that despite this handicap Greece would this year produce all the basic foodstuffs required for domestic consumption - thanks to American Technical assistance. Acknowledging this statement with a non-committal smile, Dr. Osegueda went on to describe conditions in rural Guatemala prior to 1944. He said among other things that farm laborers had been roped together by the Army for delivery to the low-land farms where they were kept in debt slavery by the landowners.

These conditions had been changed by the 1944 Revolution, Dr. Oseguera said. The Constitution, which he described as a "beautiful document," forbade imprisonment for debt, the Labor Code provided a degree of protection for workers, and finally the Agrarian Reform had been enacted to give workers unused land which they could till. Among the lands expropriated, he continued, had been the idle properties of the United Fruit Company around Tiquisate, "which has given rise to a problem with the United States." Because of these necessary social reforms, he said, Guatemala had been called a Communist country by the United States press and even by United States Government officials. Mr. Peurifoy endeavored to interject that the latter point was not correct, but Dr. Oseguera waved the explanation aside, saying he had spent two and one half hours talking with Mr. Cabot. Mr. Peurifoy then asked if Dr. Oseguera was aware that agrarian reform had been instituted in China and that China was today a Communist country. Dr. Oseguera replied that he was not "one of them" (Communist Communists). He said he knew nearly every prominent Communist leader in the Americas, mentioning Pablo NERUDA, Carlos Luis FALLAS, Juan MARINELLO, Rodolfo GHIOLDI and "that young fellow up in Mexico," but asserted that he did not share their views. When Ambassador Peurifoy remarked that he had recently seen a photograph in a magazine of Dr. Oseguera in conference with FORTUNY [the local Communist leader] Dr. Oseguera rapidly changed the subject.

Returning to agrarian reform, Dr. Oseguera said that the people really wanted it and that Mr. Peurifoy should go out into the country and see for himself. Mr. Peurifoy said he intended to do exactly that. He went on to say that he was deeply interested in social progress, that he had worked his way up from the bottom and that he was certainly not opposed to change in the proper circumstances. Dr. Oseguera said he was glad to hear that and, concluding, once again welcomed Mr. Peurifoy to Guatemala and offered his cooperation in the solution of mutual problems.